

RESOLUTION NO. 13-919

WHEREAS, the City Council and Mayor of the City of Huntsville, Alabama, are apprised of the historical 50th Anniversary on November 22nd of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, and the legacy of one of America's most beloved leaders. This time also brings to mind Bob Hayden, a Huntsville native and graduate of Alabama A & M University, who participated in an important part of the funeral proceedings for the deceased President as one of the first blacks to serve on a White House honor guard; and,

WHEREAS, in 1960, Bob Hayden was drafted into the U. S. Army during a time of social and racial unrest in our country. While stationed in Arkansas, an officer asked if he would salute the commander in chief and was told a definite 'no', not with the way blacks were treated in the military at that time. He felt the promise to defend the Constitution was not to be enjoyed by black servicemen. However, he decided rather than a failure, he was going to be a success. He did everything he was ordered and never complained; and,

WHEREAS, eventually he was transferred to Fort Myer in Virginia, which provides personnel for the honor guard at the White House. Bob was told black men didn't have the ability or the means to know how to do that specific job, and felt he was assigned to the honor guard to make that point. Instead, he did his job so well that he stood the first watch at Arlington National Cemetery following the President's funeral; and,

WHEREAS, on the ill-fated November 22, 1963, Bob was taking a leisurely day away from his usual duties that included serving in the honor guard at the White House. He had performed as part of a drill team for President Kennedy only a few nights before and received a written note for a job well done. Bob was aroused from sleep and began watching television to learn the President had been shot and had died. Stunned and speechless, he arose and reached for his uniform, knowing he would be a part of history; and,

WHEREAS, even though President Harry Truman had issued an executive order in 1948 to immediately integrate the military, blacks were still sparse. They joined the White House honor guard only when John Kennedy came into office. First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy noticed there were no blacks in the inaugural parade, and brought it to the attention of the newly seated President; and,

WHEREAS, during Bob's 72 straight hours of duty, he was instructed how to stand, not to blink or stare, to know what he was doing but not to get caught up in the moment. There were 30-minute breaks to eat, shower, use bathroom facilities and change uniforms. He performed his duty without regard for his emotions; and,

WHEREAS, the 7-man honor guard arrived by motorcade at Andrews Air Force Base to greet the body. From Andrews, they went to Bethesda Medical Center for the autopsy. After narrowing the selection of the coffin to three, the First Lady asked the honor guard to make the final selection by secret ballot. They then traveled to the White House to the East Room for the viewing to begin at 8:00 in the evening. Bob Hayden was present when First Lady Jacqueline and daughter Caroline kneeled at the President's coffin the night before the funeral, he was there during the procession from downtown Washington across the Potomac River to Arlington National Cemetery and stood the first watch at Arlington after the funeral, culminating those 72 hours; and,

WHEREAS, Bob came to the realization that the inequality exhibited toward blacks was not about him. It was about the 30 million others who looked like him. He had to look within himself and make an alteration, change his personality and his behavior.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council and Mayor of the City of Huntsville, Alabama, acknowledge Bob Haden's actions during this crucial time in the history of our country to express his belief of inequality in a quiet manner, and to prove himself and others of his race as capable and deserving of more responsibility in all areas of life in America.

ADOPTED this the 21st day of November, 2013.

President of the City Council of the
City of Huntsville, Alabama

APPROVED this the 21st day of November, 2013.

Mayor of the City of Huntsville, Alabama